



The Christmas Holidays in Provence Combine Time-Honored Traditions, Festive Markets and Tantalizing Foods & Wines

(New York, NY, December 8, 2015) – When people think of France’s picturesque region of Provence, images come to mind of crisp, pink rosé wines paired with fresh Mediterranean foods, aromatic lavender fields, brilliant sunshine, blue seascapes, and striking mountain ranges. But the winter months bring a different, celebratory tone to Provence that includes time-honored Christmas traditions.



As part of Provence’s Christmas festivities, its notable rosé wines bring added festive style to the holiday tables. Produced in all shades of pink and with various flavor notes, these crisp, fresh, dry wines are the perfect counterpoint to Christmas feasts, whether enjoyed in Provence or at your own holiday table. The versatility of Provence rosé lends itself to a vast array of pairings from roast leg of lamb, guinea fowl, and whole roast fish, all of which are common on the Provençal holiday table, to traditional American dishes such as roast turkey or ham, vegetables of all types, and of course as a pre-dinner apéritif. (photo: CIVP)

In Provence, the Christmas season officially begins on December 4, 2015 and ends on February 2, 2016 (Candlemas), and is a wonderful time of year for visiting the region. During this season, holiday displays, fairs and festivals complement Provence’s notable cuisine and wines. All are enjoyed in an atmosphere of typical Provençal warmth and hospitality.

Provence’s Celebrated Christmas Traditions

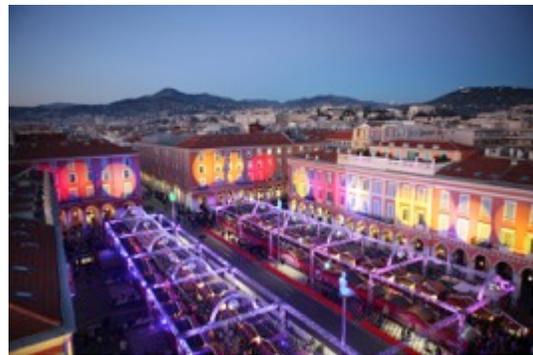
Steeped in ancient symbolism and each with its own meaning, Provence’s Christmas traditions draw locals and visitors alike with their religious, cultural and artistic displays. Some of the most popular include:

- **Artisanal *Vin Cuit*** – A sweet wine produced by cooking the juice from the grapes for several days to concentrate it and increase its sugars. After the cooking process, the juice is transferred to oak barrels where it will ferment and then age for two years. The finished wine has a dark red-amber color, with complex notes of orange, dried fruits, coffee and spices. *Vin Cuit* is the traditional accompaniment to the *13 Desserts* and also goes well with cakes, cheese and foie gras. Wineries from Provence that offer *Vin Cuit* include [Mas de Cadenet](#), [Château de Saint Martin](#) and [Château Virant](#)
- **The Sweetness of the *13 Desserts*** – Served after Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve, these tantalizing treats represent a selection of candied, crystallized fruit and other special sweets. They typically include a base of four items that commemorate four Catholic religious orders: walnuts and hazelnuts (Augustinians), dried figs (Franciscans), almonds (Carmelites) and raisins (Dominicans). On the occasion of Epiphany (January 6), a *galette des rois* – a candied fruit-studded brioche-like cake – is typically shared among friends and family.
- **The Craft of *Santons*** – Known as the « Little Saints » these handcrafted clay figurines were originally intended for placement in *crèches*, but have expanded since the 19th century to depict Provence’s everyday life. Both lifelike and abstract, they can be found in churches, museums, Christmas markets and shops.
- **Religious *Nativity Scenes*** – Displayed in churches and other locations throughout Provence’s communities, Nativity scenes feature the Baby Jesus, the Virgin Mary, Joseph and other biblical and secular *santons*. The scenes are removed at the end of Christmas festivities on February 2.

- **The Symbolism of *Wheat*** – Sprouted from seeds planted during the Feast of Saint Barbara (Fête de la Sainte Barbe) on December 4th, wheat signifies prospects of prosperity for the coming year. Planted on damp cotton wool in three small saucers representing the Holy Trinity, the rate of growth symbolizes the success of the coming year.
- **Christmas Fairs, Markets and Festivals** – Located throughout the towns and cities of Provence, these glittering events showcase local vendors selling handmade products, food and wine. Some examples include events taking place in...
 - **Aix en Provence** – La Rotonde, the Cours Mirabeau and Old Town are decorated with festive displays. Fête de la Sainte Lucie (December 9) includes songs and mulled wine; Bravade Calendale (December 20) is a ceremonial procession with musicians, dancers and folklore; Olive Oil Festival (December 12-13) is followed by the Marché des 13 Desserts (December 18-24); the vendors of Christmas crib figures (santoniers) are on the Allées Provençales (thru December 30), and the Marché des Rois is a street processional of carols and folk songs (January 10).
 - **Brignoles** – On December 18th the Christmas festivities reach their climax with the traditional Pastorale Provençal – an annual theatrical presentation of the nativity scene. During this time, visitors can watch the show and enjoy all of the festive delights of the market including mulled local wine, grilled chestnuts, traditional cookies, nougat and more.
 - **Marseille** – The city’s famed Foire aux Santons dates back to 1803, with some 30 santoniers displaying their wares through December 31. The Christmas craft market on the Old Port offers ceramics, soaps, toys and sweets through December 31.
 - **Nice** – The Christmas village runs from December 4th to January 3rd at the Place Masséna and the Promenade du Paillon. Everyday features Christmas lighting displays, more than 60 local craftsmen displaying their goods for purchase, carousels and other games, and even an ice rink for skating.
 - **Saint Tropez** – Visitors to this city on the sea will experience numerous holiday sights including: children’s games and activities, an ornate nativity display at the Chapelle de la Miséricorde, ice sculptures and igloos, a workshop detailing how santons are made, and much more.
 - **Toulon** – A daily Christmas market takes place here through December 31, including around 40 chalets, a crib with over 700 santons, and a giant skating rink.



Credit: Sophie Spiteri



Credit: OTCN

To assist with trip planning to the wine region of Provence, visitors may consult the wine tourism section of the Wines of Provence website, <http://winesofprovence.com/site/tourism>, and search by preferred type of tourism, winery and lodging options. Here travelers will find those estates whose wines are available in the U.S., enabling them to return home and re-live the memory of an experience-rich vacation.

The Conseil Interprofessionnel des Vins de Provence (CIVP), known in the United States as the Provence Wine Council, is an organization representing more than 600 wine producers and 40 trade companies from the Provence region of France. Its mission is to promote and advance the wines of the region’s principal appellations: Côtes de Provence, Coteaux Varois en Provence, and Coteaux d’Aix-en-Provence. The organization’s members together produce 96 percent of Provence’s Appellation d’Origine Protégée (AOP) wines. More information can be found online at www.winesofprovence.com or on social media:

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Media Contacts

Joan Brower/Janet Bartucci
The Dilenschneider Group, Inc.
Chrysler Building, 405 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10174
Tel.: 212-922-0900; Fax: 212-922-0971
media@winesofprovence.com

Trade Contacts

Julie Peterson/Carlene Hastings
Vins de Provence - U.S. Office
1025 Thomas Jefferson St. NW, Suite 420 East
Washington, DC 20007
Tel: 202-499-4263
chastings@winesofprovence.com